

Administration of Barack Obama, 2013

Remarks at Camp Pendleton, California

August 7, 2013

The President. Hello, Marines!

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. Hello, Camp Pendleton!

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. Well, listen, it is great to be here, at the home of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force—

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. —and one of our Nation's oldest and most decorated military units, the legendary 1st Marine Division.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. And I think I see some proud Navy folks here too.

Audience members. Hooah!

Let me thank General Nicholson for the introduction and for his outstanding leadership of our Marines in Iraq, in Afghanistan. And that includes your command of the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade out of Camp Lejeune, which we recognized last year with the Presidential Unit Citation. Thank you, General Nicholson.

I want to thank all of your commanders for welcoming me today, including General Coglianese and General Busby. And I want to recognize your incredible staff, noncommissioned officers, including Sergeant Majors Ronald Green, Scott Helms, and David Jobe.

I want to salute Debbie Nicholson and all the spouses and military families who are here, because we understand they're the force behind the force. Just like Michelle is the force behind me. I want everyone to give a big round of applause to the amazing families who serve along with you.

And I want to acknowledge Members of Congress who are here, including Susan Davis, Darrell Issa, and Dana Rohrabacher.

Now, I've got to tell you the truth, I've been looking forward to this visit because—and this is a little tricky to say this—but my family and I, we've got a special place in our hearts for the Marine Corps.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. Now, part of it is because every day at the White House, we're surrounded by marines.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. In fact, we've probably got some folks here who were at the White House, who are now here at Camp Pendleton.

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. See? [Laughter] I figured as much.

And then, of course, every time I need, kind of a hop, skip, and a jump somewhere, every time I get on Marine One, I rely on some of the best aviators in the world. I've seen your honor, I've seen your courage, I've seen your commitment; whether in protecting our diplomatic posts around the world or preparing to deploy to Iraq or Afghanistan or recovering from wounds received in battle.

A few years ago, you gave a great Camp Pendleton welcome to my wife Michelle. And I know it's not as exciting when I come to visit—[laughter]—but she says hi. I guess I'm kind of like that Army general who once said; "The more marines I have around, the better I like it."

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. I'm here because, for more than a decade, you—and all our men and women in uniform—have borne the burden in this time of war. Ever since that awful September morning when our Nation was attacked, when thousands of innocent Americans were killed, we've been at war against Al Qaida. And our fight in Afghanistan—nearly 12 years—has become America's longest war. I'm here because we recently marked another milestone in this war. As of this past June, for the first time, Afghan forces have taken the lead for security across their entire country.

Instead of leading the fight, our troops now have a different mission, which is to train and advise and assist Afghan forces. And what that signals is that our war in Afghanistan has entered the final chapter. More of our troops are coming home. We'll be down to 34,000 this winter. By the end of next year—in just 17 months—the transition will be complete. Afghans will take full responsibility for their security, and our war in Afghanistan will be over.

None of this progress would have been possible had it not been for you. We thank all who have served there, especially our Camp Pendleton marines. After our Nation was attacked, you were some of the very first conventional forces in Afghanistan; racing in, hundreds of miles by helicopter, toppling that regime and driving Al Qaida from its camps. Then when the fight shifted to Iraq, you were there, racing towards Baghdad, deposing a dictator. And through years of combat—in Tikrit, Fallujah, and Ramadi—your courage added to the glories of the Marines' long and illustrious history.

When we refocused on Afghanistan, you led the way again, surging into Helmand, pushing the Taliban out of its strongholds, like Marjah and Now Zad and Sangin.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. And when future generations study those fights, they will stand in awe of the unparalleled sacrifice of the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines—our "Darkhorse" Marines.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. Today we hold close the memory of all who have made the ultimate sacrifice in these years of war. That includes 326 fallen heroes from Camp Pendleton. We honor all of them, every single one. And we stand with their families, like the Gold Star families that I had an opportunity to meet with before I came out here. We are grateful to them. We're grateful for their sacrifice. They've given a piece of their heart to America, and America will always honor their sacrifice.

I know some of you recently returned from Afghanistan. On behalf of a grateful Nation, welcome home. We send our prayers to all those who, at this very moment, are still in harm's way, including your Regimental Combat Team 7, which is coming home this month.

Audience members. Yeah!

The President. I know some of you are getting ready to deploy in the months to come.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. This is still a hard fight. Our Afghan partners have stepped up. They're bearing a bigger brunt of the firepower. They're taking on a lot more casualties. They're in the lead, but it's still tough. And we're still needed.

And here's what I want every single one of you to know. Because of you, the 9/11 generation, we are accomplishing what we set out to do. Because of you, Usama bin Laden is no more.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. Because of you, Al Qaida's top ranks have been hammered. The core of Al Qaida in Afghanistan and Pakistan is on the way to defeat. That happened because of you. Because of you, more Afghans are reclaiming their communities—their markets, their schools, their towns—and they have a chance to forge their own future. Because of you, more Afghans are trained and stepping up and defending their own country. Because of you—and to preserve the gains you fought and bled for—we are going to make sure that Afghanistan is never again a source of attacks against our country.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. That happened because of you.

So the war in Afghanistan will end. For you, that means fewer deployments. It means more training time, preparing for the future, getting back to what Marines do better than anybody else on Earth: amphibious operations.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. It means more time here on the home front with your families: your wives, your husbands, your kids.

But of course, the end of the war in Afghanistan doesn't mean the end of threats to our Nation. As I've said before, even as we decimated the Al Qaida leadership that attacked us on 9/11, Al Qaida affiliates and like-minded extremists still threaten our homeland, still threaten our diplomatic facilities, still threaten our businesses abroad. And we've got to take these threats seriously and do all we can to confront them. We've been reminded of this again in recent days.

So I want to take a special time out to salute all our brave diplomats and tireless intelligence and military personnel who have been working around the clock to safeguard our Embassies and our consulates and our fellow Americans serving overseas, including all those vigilant marines standing guard at our Embassies around the world. They're doing an outstanding job.

As for these extremists, here's what those who would cowardly attack our civilians don't get: The United States is never going to retreat from the world. We don't get terrorized. We're going to keep standing up for our interests. We're going to keep standing up for the security of

our citizens. We're going to keep standing up for human rights and dignity for people wherever they live. We're going to keep working with our allies and our partners. We're going to keep offering a future of hope and progress, in stark contrast to terrorists who only know how to kill and destroy and maim. And like generations before us, the United States of America is going to remain the greatest force for freedom that the world has ever known.

You are an integral part of that. That's what you do, serving in uniform every single day. But this is not just a job for our military: It takes diplomacy, it takes development, it takes trade, it takes intelligence to stay true to our values as a nation. This is a complicated time. The world is going through big changes, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. And we have to have a military strategy to protect ourselves. But we've also got to lead with our values and our ideals and all elements of our power.

But it does mean keeping our military the absolute best in the world. We've got to be vigilant about that. As the war in Afghanistan ends, it's true, our military, including our Marine Corps, will be leaner. Budgets will be tighter, and that's only natural. Part of ending a war, responsibly, is moving off a perpetual wartime footing. It's time to use some of the money we've been spending on war to do some nation-building right here at home.

But what we can't do is repeat the mistakes of history. We've seen in the past where, after a war, we hollowed out our military, left our military unprepared. We've got, right now, the best led, best trained, best equipped military in human history. Our Marine Corps is the finest expeditionary force in the world.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. And as long as I am Commander in Chief, I'm going to keep it that way.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. Now, to do that, we're going to need some help out of Washington. Congress couldn't agree on a plan to reduce the deficit in a—what I consider a sensible way, so instead what we've got is these big, across-the-board cuts called the sequester. Sequester kicked in; it includes defense. And we're already starting to see the effects. Here at Pendleton, you're feeling it. Hard-working folks are getting furloughed, families getting by on less, fewer ships available for your training exercises, the commissary your families rely on closed a day a week. We can do better than that. That's not how a great nation should be treating its military and military families.

And by the way, cuts in other nondefense areas of the budget affect our troops and our military families as well. Our military, part of what makes us best is we've got extraordinary recruits. But if we want the best qualified recruits, we shouldn't be cutting investments in education. We should be increasing our investments in education.

Our wounded warriors, our veterans depend on new technologies for their recovery and their health care, so we shouldn't be slashing investments in science and medical research. We should continue to be the world leader in science and research, so, that's why I'm going to keep on working to get rid of this sequester. You get up and do your jobs every day; let's make sure Washington gets up and does its job.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. And what makes me frustrated is, sometimes, the very folks who say they stand with our military proudly, are the same ones who are standing in the way of fixing the sequester.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. It's important to look at deeds and not words.

Now, keep in mind, it is true that for our national security we've always got to look and make sure we're dealing with our deficits and our debt. Our economy is strong, that means the military will be strong. If our economy is weak, that weakens our military. But our deficits right now are falling at the fastest rate in decades. We've cut them in half, and they keep on moving in the right direction. In that context, Congress needs to agree on a responsible plan that reduces our deficits, but also keeps our military strong, also invests in education, also invests in research, also invests in our infrastructure.

That's what you deserve. That's what your families deserve. That's what I'm fighting for, and that is my commitment to you.

Now, keeping our military strong requires something else, and that's taking care of our extraordinary wounded warriors. Here at Pendleton, you're doing outstanding work. For those who can, we want to get our troops back to where they want to be: back with their units. For those with traumatic brain injury, we're going to keep making unprecedented investments in new care and new treatments. For those suffering from posttraumatic stress, we're going to keep saying it as loud as we can: It is not a sign of weakness to ask for help; it is a sign of strength. And we're here to help you recover and stand tall again.

We've got to make sure that we're doing everything we can for our wounded warriors. And I'm pleased to see that the hospital here is making progress. That's going to be an outstanding new facility that will be helpful.

Keeping our military strong also means ensuring the safety of everyone who puts on the uniform. No military unit can succeed without discipline, without trust, and without cohesion. So I want you to hear it directly from me, the Commander in Chief: It undermines what this military stands for and it undermines what the Marine Corps stands for when sexual assault takes place within our units. And that's why we are going to work together—all of us—to stop these crimes of sexual assault and uphold the honor and the integrity that defines the finest military on Earth. And that message is coming all the way from the top.

Keeping our military strong means keeping our military families strong. Michelle and Vice President—Joe Biden's wife, Dr. Jill Biden, they've made this their mission. And because of their efforts—Joining Forces—more Americans are stepping up to support your families. And that includes more companies hiring our talented military spouses. After everything you've done for America, every American ought to be doing something to support your families.

As this time of war ends, some of you will be taking off the uniform and returning to civilian life. And just as we gave you the tools to succeed on the battlefield, I want to make sure we're giving you the tools to succeed in the next stage of your lives as well.

So we've improved transition assistance to help you find the job that's worthy of your skills. We're helping you and your families pursue your education under the post-9/11 GI bill and making sure that instead of ripping you off, schools that give you the education you paid for, are being held accountable.

We're making sure more States and more industries are recognizing your military skills with licenses and credentials you need for a civilian job. When I first came into office, I was meeting medics who had been treating folks on the battlefield, and when they went back to school because they wanted to be a nurse, they had to start all over again at nursing 101. And here they are, dealing with some of the worst injuries possible, and they're not getting any credit for it, which means it's costing them time, costing them money. We're changing all that. If you've done the job on the battlefield with bullets coming at you, you can sure as heck do the job back here in the United States of America.

Then we issued a challenge to the private sector, and so far, America's businesses have hired or trained 290,000 veterans and military spouses, and they've committed to hiring hundreds of thousands more. So, more vets are finding jobs. The unemployment rate for vets is coming down. And we're going to keep saying to every company in America, if you want somebody who knows how to get the job done, hire a veteran.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. Hire a veteran. Your generation has carried us through this time of war; well, you're going to help us write the next great chapter in American history, right here at home.

Now, few embody that truth more than a marine who's here today, Captain Matthew Lampert. Matt is one of our Marine special operators. He and his team were in Afghanistan cleaning out a compound, and then, in a terrible incident, an IED took both of his legs. Matt survived. And soon he had a new mission: getting back to his unit, back to his team—"Once a marine, always a marine."

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. So Matt endured excruciating rehab, therapy that could last all day, month after month, rebuilding his strength. Recovery was slow: taking his first shaky steps on short prosthetics; then a new pair of knees; then full legs, taking him back to normal height; stepping forward with two canes, then just one, then none; learning to walk again; learning to run, in his uniform, then his body armor. And then, just 18 months after he was injured and lost both legs, Matt—a double amputee—returned to his unit and redeployed to Afghanistan.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. For a time, Matt even served as team leader. And today, Matt and his company are preparing for their next deployment, to the Pacific. His wife Camille, also a marine, is working to become a test pilot because, Matt says, she likes to "fly aggressively." [*Laughter*] And this inspiring Marine couple is looking ahead to serving their country for many years to come.

Matt and Camille, please wave. Thank you so much. Thank you so much.

There are stories like Matt and Camille's throughout our Marine Corps. They represent what's best in our Marine Corps. Semper Fidelis.

Audience members. Hooah!

The President. That's the ethic of your lives: Always faithful; Always faithful to each other, the few and the proud; Always faithful to your Corps, for 237 years. Always faithful to your country, for whom you wear the eagle, globe, and anchor. After all you've given to our Nation, you have to know your Nation will always be faithful to you.

As your Commander in Chief, that's my commitment to you. That's the commitment America must uphold to you and your family for all the years to come.

Semper Fi. God bless you all. God bless the Marine Corps, and God bless the United States of America.

Audience members. Hooah!

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:45 p.m. in Hangar 6 West. In his remarks, he referred to Maj. Gen. Lawrence D. Nicholson, USMC, commander, 1st Marine Division, and his wife Debbie; Brig. Gen. Vincent A. Coglianesse, USMC, commander, 1st Marine Logistics Group; Maj. Gen. Steven W. Busby, USMC, commander, 3d Marine Air Wing; Sgt. Maj. Ronald L. Green, USMC, sergeant major, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force and U.S. Marine Central Command; Sgt. Maj. Scott R. Helms, USMC, sergeant major, Marine Corps Installations West-Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton; and Sgt. Maj. David L. Jobe, USMC; sergeant major, 1st Marine Division.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Camp Pendleton, CA.

Locations: Camp Pendleton, CA.

Names: Biden, Jill T.; Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Busby, Steven W.; Coglianesse, Vincent A.; Davis, Susan A.; Green, Ronald L.; Helms, Scott R.; Issa, Darrell E.; Jobe, David L.; Lampert, Camille; Lampert, Matthew; Nicholson, Debbie; Nicholson, Lawrence D.; Obama, Michelle; Rohrabacher, Dana.

Subjects: Afghanistan : Afghan military and security forces; Afghanistan : Former regime; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Casualties; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Casualties; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), treatment efforts; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Sexual assault; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Traumatic brain injuries, treatment efforts; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; California : Camp Pendleton; California : President's visit; Foreign policy, U.S. : Civil and human rights, promotion efforts; Foreign policy, U.S. : Diplomatic security, strengthening efforts; Middle East : Democracy efforts; North Africa : Democracy efforts; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist group; Terrorism : Global threat; Terrorism : September 11, 2001, attacks; Veterans : Hiring incentives; Veterans : Job training and education assistance.

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